



The Role of Leadership in Scholastic Journalism

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Exploring Editorial Leadership:

The Role of Leadership in Scholastic Journalism

In the 21st century, nearly every norm, value, practice and role within journalism is being questioned (Ryfe, 2012). There is no doubt journalism leaders are currently facing unprecedented challenges (Örnebring, 2018). Under those consequences, research and investments are being made in professional journalism newsrooms across the country to train newsroom leaders to improve journalism (Callinan, 2001; Herndon & Krueger, 2016; Killebrew, 2003; Mierzejewska, 2011; Mulrennan, 2018; Perez-Latre & Sanchez-Taberner, 2003). Until this study, little to no research has been conducted on high school journalism advisers and how they teach leadership. The premise is that high school journalism advisers teaching editorial leadership can further advance the future of media excellence.

This study was designed to address the significant role leadership has within high school journalism education, which is known as editorial leadership (Newton, 2018). This current study revealed advisers' perceptions of the role leadership plays within high school news labs. Advisers considered the role of leadership as a behavioral process influencing their students towards set goals. Overall, when leadership is exhibited the adviser is striving for established goals through built trust and consensus.

The body of evidence reviewed leads to recommendations for actionable editorial leadership training, policy, and change within journalism educators'

curriculum. Ultimately, this study examines the critical role editorial leadership plays within scholastic journalism and considers how advisers teach leadership in journalism classes, a previously unresearched realm. As such, the following research question was the basis for this study:

RQ1: What role does leadership play in K-12 journalism education?

Review of Literature

Little has been known about high school journalism advisers' perspectives and how they teach leadership. Educators need to transform media education at every level, from the nature and work of a media professional, to the content, organizational, and financial structure of media and their relationships with the public (Pavlik, 2013). To date, research has focused on how to train professional newsroom leaders, but not in high school news labs, which resulted in under-researched facets of leadership in journalism education. The scholarly conversation in journalism education has focused on a two-directional tension. In one direction, there has been an effort to educate both reporters and editors to bolster their contribution to democracy through improved journalism. On the other end, there has been an emphasis on training newsroom staff to function efficiently in their news environment (Folkerts, 2014).

Under these circumstances, there was a need to fill the existing gap in literature with two specific concepts. First, little to no research has been conducted

on high school journalism advisers teaching editorial leadership. Editorial leadership provides advisers and students the capabilities to lead an effective, efficient, and vibrant news lab (Pavlik, 2013). Throughout the last two decades, researchers have been systematically investigating leadership in many professional newsrooms (Mierzejewska, 2011). The current research demonstrates a link between pedagogy and best practices within the context of professional education and higher educational successes. However, professional newsrooms do not influence school policy or curriculum. Students are suffering from academia's slow reaction time to new professional leadership expectations (Newton, 2018; Örnebring, 2018). Secondly, there was a need to understand advisers' perceptions of the role leadership plays within high school news labs. Furthermore, journalism education scholars suggested students develop successful leadership concepts and behaviors through news creation, production, editing and community distribution (Herndon, & Krueger, 2016; Mensing, 2010). Scholars support the need for professional newsrooms to emphasize editorial leadership with the foundations of social sensibility, relevance, and accuracy (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). When working with scholastic journalism news labs, emphasizing leadership is the most promising path for increasing students' success (Bronstein & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Herndon, & Krueger, 2016; Mensing, 2010; Newton 2018; Pavlik, 2013).

Design of the Study

This qualitative study investigated the methods Missouri scholastic journalism advisers used to teach leadership skills. Data were collected on advisers' current skills, practices, and experiences to answer the research question. The qualitative research granted multiple constructed realities and involvement within the contextual situation of the study, creating the opportunity for understanding the reality found within the setting (Creswell, 2014).

Setting: The setting was a representative sample of 24 public secondary schools' journalism news labs across Missouri. Each was determined by a set criterion. For this study, journalism news labs were defined as a high school classroom serving as a newsroom, using a grading criterion for assessment, and without collecting payments for publications (Collins, 2017). The setting was also determined by the Missouri Interscholastic Press Association's (MIPA) membership. MIPA separates the state into four different regions.

Participants: The study's 24 participants were a representative non-random and purposeful sample of advisers from MIPA's membership, who received the All-Missouri award in the last two years. MIPA's highest placement is the All-Missouri award, which is earned by high school's productions meeting the highest standards in their journalistic coverage, as MIPA judges choose roughly the top 10% of the entries to recognize as All-Missouri award winners. The All-Missouri awards are granted in the following categories: newspaper, photography, yearbook, and broadcast and multi-media coverage.

Size: Each of those categories are divided by each school's population. The participating high schools were categorized by MIPA's overall school size with the following student population categories: extra-large schools 1,700+ students; large schools 1,201-1,700 students; medium schools 701-1,200 students; and, small schools 1-700 students (MIPA, 2019).

Data Collection Tools: Twenty-three interviews took place at high school journalism news labs and one by phone. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher received the adviser's consent for the study and permission to audio record. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were based upon the research questions focusing on editorial leadership, teaching journalism, and advising their various news labs.

Throughout each interview, the researcher observed social behaviors in the news lab as they occurred by gathering field notes. The observations further explored the advisers' leadership pedagogy. The adviser's role of leadership and editorial leadership skills were explored. Current artifacts of the adviser's curriculum, assignments, student publications, and productions were also reviewed. The purpose was to further observe how the adviser's editorial leadership aspects reflected in the students' work.

Data Analysis

The researcher gathered triangulated data from interviews, observations, and artifacts to enhance the assessment of the findings' accuracy (Creswell, 2014). The data analysis process ensued immediately after data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcriptions were made of all the interviews. Once all transcriptions were completed, the researcher read through transcriptions and noted common trends and themes. Next, various themes emerged, which were assigned codes, and labeled on the transcripts. The

practice of coding included the identification of each item in the research and then organizing them into individual themes (Creswell, 2014; Emerson, 1995; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Initial codes were determined by connecting aspects of the five research questions. Themes and patterns were established through checked transcripts, field notes and artifacts. Next, the themes were connected to the research questions. Finally, the researcher began the ongoing process of answering the research questions through further analysis to identify key editorial leadership elements.

Findings

Leadership plays a significant role in journalism education to empower students. The role of leadership empowered students to be trusted and effectively meet expectations on their own. The advisers interviewed for this study created trust and consensus around their news lab's common vision to inspire students. The importance of this role was evident in supporting the students to do their best and reach their goals.

Inspiring Students Toward Goals: When asked, "How do you inspire a shared leadership vision?" the advisers disclosed concepts directing the news lab's overall production workflow. In fact, leadership plays such a strong role among news lab practices that all of the advisers articulated the importance of teaching leadership in deadlines, work sessions, and decision making. The advisers in this study built their award-winning practices off one common foundational component: a vision statement. Advisers and students developing their vision together demonstrates the significant role leadership plays in news labs.

Advisers and students gain a mutual understanding of their goals through collaborating on a vision. Advisers inspire their students to work with them to create success. Effective advisers shared they have a clear outline of goals and what they need to accomplish through their vision. Leadership plays a supporting role in helping advisers establish common goals to motivate their student productions. Advisers considered leadership as a behavioral process that influences their students and whole news lab towards set goals. As such, an adviser has the dual function of ensuring each student's satisfaction while steering the news lab to success.

Advisers revealed that leadership skills can be taught, practiced and improved. An adviser's primary role is to enable the success of everyone in the news lab. All the advisers commented they continually

appealed to each student by articulating production goals and their editors pronounced their shared vision to their news lab. The data supported the benefits of inspiring creativity and loyalty because it is helpful for effective production.

Effective advisers explained they share their production goals with their students by calling it a vision. The vision is used to raise the students' aspirations and devise a plan for what they want to become. Common news lab slogans, positions, and procedures are essential for advisers to influence their students' effective production. Advisers use their news lab motto to inspire their entire staff. Students will consult their shared vision for what to do, or say to make sure all they do meet the mottos ideals.

News labs develop leadership beliefs in purposeful ways. At the beginning of each school year, advisers facilitate traditions for students to create their news lab motto. The advisers lead their student editors to decide on a catch phrase and ideas to motivate their news lab. All the interviews, observations, and artifacts revealed news lab mottos were promoted through room decorations, posters, student t-shirts, and the overall news lab productions. Some of the advisers reported they reach outside of their news lab through books, music, and social media for their news lab inspiration. Advisers went as far as to facilitate their traditions at national conferences, leadership retreats, leadership retreats, and boot camps. These camps and retreats are structured to provide the student editors training to make the motto for the upcoming year. There was not one specific way to do this, but once the school year began, each news lab motivated the students through the continued use of their common vision. The different mottos enforced the news lab's shared vision. The data revealed many news lab mottos, including: Story is King, Create Magic, Hands off, Journalist 24/7, Beacon of Light, Make Good Choices, Get Out of the Way, Everyone has a Story, Be Coachable, For Us by Us, News For Students by Students, and Journalism Matters.

Specifically, Liza's news lab has a motto made by her students. She commented that her news lab earned her trust by continually producing high quality work. She explained, "Story is king. If students can't tell me a good story with a beginning and middle and end, I don't care how much your camera costs or what you're editing with. Story is what drives everything." The data illustrate the students are invested in their news labs and are empowered to put a name on their

work.

Advisers are intentional in designing their shared vision. Elise's student editors attend a summer camp each year. She explained how her shared vision of, "Hands Off" was found during the students' summer camp and translated into having a completely student driven news lab, "My editors organize our coverage. Our staff wants to all be part of our Friday night football games. The editors know where the staffers can be on the field and how to get the good shots. I just love watching. They definitely are like little moms helping our young ones." Elise further stated the editors know their common vision and the staffers can be intimidated, but they mentor them. She said, "They don't mind going to a softball game by themselves because they face their fear and learn how journalism works. It's huge growth that can't be taught in a classroom. Just watching it is perfection. We're showing them how to be leaders."

The traditions that were put in place for the news lab's motto also helped advisers provide agreed upon structure for positions and procedures. The advisers facilitate their student editors to decide on their assigned editor positions based upon the ideals of their shared vision. Leah believes an understanding of their "News for Students by Students" slogan has transformed her students into their leadership positions. She believes the students understanding of their shared vision elevated the students to take ownership and effectively lead their workflow. Leah explained the vision helps her editors lead. She further explained her students develop their positions and the news lab procedures. As a result, her editors oversee the news lab before she becomes personally involved. She said, "The editors put out the fires all the time. The kids are aware of it and they understand the dynamic of it because they helped decide it."

The importance of the student editor position was reflected through interviews as advisers marked time by their editor's name rather than publication name or date. Throughout interviews advisers referred to their previous editors. For instance, Leah explained how each editor puts their stamp on the year's production, product, and overall morale throughout the news lab. She further illustrated, "I've had those great student editors throughout my whole career. Each has been part of a thread of students that have built our program throughout the years."

Advisers believe teaching leadership motivates students. The advisers revealed following a common

vision and expectations helps students produce creative work based upon their genuine convictions. Advisers nurture their student leaders who, in turn, further build consensus to nurture a next generation of student leaders. The role of leadership was evident in supporting the students to make their own vision to take ownership and produce a high-quality product. Ultimately, high quality programs have a continuous cycle of leadership development that appears effortless.

Building Trust: Trusting relationships between advisers and their students are significant in the role of leadership in journalism education. Advisers shared personal connections with their editors helps the news labs' production and their teaching experience. Specifically, the study found that advisers established their most effective student leaders through deliberate processes designed to encourage students in direct and personal ways. Advisers shared strong relationships and ongoing communication maximize the trust throughout their news lab.

Madison believes her editors trust her because she puts trust in them and they feel they have a personal stake in their news lab and it is more than just a class. Other advisers had similar perspectives. Like Madison, Eva commented, "You can actually trust to take the reins off. It is amazing what they will do if you just say, 'I believe in you, go do it and I'm here if you fall down. I probably won't pick you up, but I'm going to be here if you fall down.' It's really cool to just see what they do."

Establishing Relationships: Through relationships, advisers establish their most effective student leaders. Essentially, the data showed trust boosts a news lab's ability for students to effectively meet expectations on their own. For example, Emily's trust in her students deepened during a long absence. Her editors were able to keep the workflow moving and produce quality work while she was on leave due to a surgery. "Everything kept moving. I think in education a lot of times, it's the dream of a lot of educators to trust their students to keep moving forward and thrive, even when they are not there." Eva also trusted her editors during a bereavement leave to attend a family funeral. She explained, "Initially, I was filled with anxiety. Then, I realized my editors know the programs and would handle the heavy lifting to keep us moving. When they see me as an adult just going, 'Let's do this,' then I think they learn adaptation skills and that they are trusted." In the same way, when Sloane's

baby was soon to be delivered, her first call outside of her family was to her editor-in-chief ensuring the completion of their upcoming deadlines. She further explained how much she trusted and depended upon her editor in that moment throughout the delivery and the following weeks of maternity leave. She commented, “I was not going to be there, and I needed to call her to let her know because we were on deadline. So, it was a little stressful for me, but good to know they were prepared for it and in safe hands with my editor.” The role of leadership empowered the students to be trusted and effectively meet expectations on their own.

Open Communication. Trust is built upon ongoing communication. Mia explained, “If our arrows are all pointed in the right direction, we can be a more effective collective.” As a result of clearly defining the vision and goals, the staff developed a strong mutual trust. She welcomed conversations on culture, emphasized publication importance, developed reasons to care, and desire to participate. Through all of this, she said, “We came to the central idea, ‘The bearers of light,’ to shine a light on good in the community. The positive we want to see more. Sometimes it means shining a light on things that are like, ‘Man, this is really messed up, or this could be better, or how do we create change?’ If you’re doing it well, you create proof to live your central mission.”

Numerous advisers revealed their appreciation and emphasis on the importance of trust. Advisers establish trust through ongoing communication and providing freedoms based upon the news lab’s common vision. Earned trust permits students to make independent decisions. Advisers articulated they trust their students to work throughout their news lab and community.

Building Consensus: Leadership plays a role in advisers building a consensus throughout journalism news labs. After advisers create a common vision and trust, the advisers’ role shifts from decision making to empowering students to make decisions. Advisers revealed intentionally influencing news labs towards consensus enhanced their ability to reach goals.

Advisers said that once they first shape the news lab to be productive and creative, the students shape the news lab’s goals from a collaborative consensus. Twenty-two advisers shared the fundamental practice of establishing professional habits, where the student editors lead the news lab by, leading budget meetings, enforcing expectations, rubric reviews, and establish-

ing work session goals. Through this student leadership at the beginning of each class time, advisers shared it is much easier to gain consensus.

In fact, advisers commented they rely on student buy-in to establish leadership roles and encourage proper decision making. Mary explained how the role of leadership helps her trust editor decisions. She explained, “Our editors have the leadership opportunity to stand up for what they believe in. Our kids have great pride and respect for what they do. They know Hazelwood versus Kuhlmeier, and the kids respect that they have the ability to make decisions.” Similar to Mary, Elizabeth explained how she builds consensus around journalism values and skills to teach her staff the big picture of future news lab leadership. Elizabeth said, “I can teach you all the skills you need, but you can’t teach passion about something, or working hard until it works, because that’s a lot of what journalism is. Because you’re going to have the bad days, the bad interviews. But when it does finally click and come all together, it’s really cool to be part of that with all of my students.” So, whether advisers are building consensus around law, ethics, values, morals, or skills, the bottom line is that these learning communities are firmly planted in the solid ground of a common set of higher ideals.

The data revealed the role of leadership generates consensus as advisers and students share convictions for their productions and program. Additionally, Elizabeth continually directs her students towards their shared purpose. Each year, she sees her students return to her news lab. She illustrated, “All come in as novices, but by the time they’re done, they’ll be an amateur or expert. I feel like if they take my class a second year they become a professional level.” The news lab’s shared decision making grows students into leaders. Similarly, Elise explained, “I always have my editors as returning staff members. They’ve been on staff before and know what’s expected. I feel like they have a good grasp on it and just have to use their knowledge.” Likewise, Erin believes her editors are invested and want their news lab to be a reflection of their agreed upon decisions. She explained:

They have a personal investment in this program. It’s not just me, it’s not just my program. It doesn’t belong to anybody but them. They have that personal stake in it. I just put some structure to it. They want to have a say in what happens. Because they know that if they’re not there, the kids who are there will decide how to steer the boat and they want that stake in it.

The role of leadership within their news lab supports the students’ opportunity to invest in their work. Similarly, Leah believes her students are invested and strive to be part of the news lab’s big picture, starting at their beginning steps as staffers. She explained, “The editors get it and they understand how they are part of the big picture because they took those first two years and they were in an environment that allowed them to take their time to learn the process to become a leader not only for themselves, but for other people, and other people will want to be them.” Advisers indicated the leading role of leadership within journalism education. It cultivates effective production, encourages creativity, and fosters shared decision making. The role of leadership helps establish a quality journalism program.

In reviewing the results of the study, successful high school advisers exhibit a vital need to teach leadership skills. Respondents clarified their genuine convictions to inspire students to meet their goals. Advisers teach leadership skills to not only meet production goals, but to provide opportunities for students to build trust and consensus. As seen through all the interviews, advisers are motivated to teach leadership and have a passion to develop their students. Ultimately, high school advisers distinguish teaching leadership as a fundamental way to empower students. Leadership skills provide advisers opportunities to articulate their passion and genuine convictions with their students.

Discussion of the Results

This present analysis supports the scholarly belief that improving journalism requires leadership training in journalism education. The qualitative data revealed high school advisers do teach leadership. Therefore, it is imperative that high school journalism advisers are informed how to effectively teach leadership.

Advisers use transformational practices to teach leadership. The advisers’ perspectives were examined through a transformational leadership theory framework (Northouse, 2016.) The findings support the transformational leadership theory. Kouzes and Posner’s (1987, 2002) model further refines how advisers use transformational leadership by suggesting that leadership is not a position, but a collection of practices and behaviors. The primary factors used were encouraging the heart, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and inspiring a shared vision.

Each participant taught leadership and revealed

their passion to develop students into self-aware leaders. Whether an adviser had three years or three decades of experience, all established aspects of editorial leadership throughout their news labs. Advisers lead their news labs by their example to encourage students to follow their common vision. Advisers used shared vision practices to define their news labs motto, positions, procedures, and passion. The current study determined that leadership plays a leading role in journalism education and identified the vital need for editorial leadership in scholastic journalism programs. Editorial leadership provides advisers and students the practices and behaviors to lead an effective, efficient, and vibrant media system within their news labs.

Motivation: Advisers have the daunting responsibility of leading all students to perform to the best of their ability; however, the motivation lays with student leaders to support the news lab’s overall vision. Leadership is important in high school journalism education because advisers must create news lab practices and behaviors to meet production goals. Filak’s (2003) study revealed it also to be the case that leadership builds culture by aligning support systems to reinforce learning and student motivation. Therefore, it is that imperative advisers enable their students to be trusted leaders through news labs common vision.

All participating advisers inspired their students to be trusted leaders in a variety of ways that illustrate the fluidity of leadership practices. It is critical for advisers to encourage their students throughout each step of their leadership training. Advisers instill confidence in their students by designing their news labs into a community of learners. Students must become part of the news lab community before they can become a leader. Teaching leadership is not a mandated curriculum standard, but a process where advisers encourage each student to master skills. Advisers continually provide their support to students until a skill is mastered within their own timeline, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. There is an importance for advisers to encourage their students with celebrations. The celebrations develop the students’ teamwork, confidence, and passion. Collins (2017) also found that higher education newsroom cultures use transformational ways to help students be encouraged and socialized to challenge one another through the news-gathering processes. Overall, advisers encourage their students to first individually master skills to grow into news lab leaders.

Participants in the current study believed fo-

cusing on their students' strengths was important to encourage student leadership development. Advisers must trust students before enabling them to be leaders. First, advisers establish student accountability with clear expectations. The students that consistently meet expectations become news lab leaders. Consequently, advisers claim those rigorous expectations heighten their students' motivation to be leaders. Therefore, once students become accountable to the news lab expectations, advisers motivate selected students to be leaders.

Ferguson, Patten, and Wilson's (2005) previous research said traditionally high school news lab's production parallels professional newsrooms by mandating the same editor positions. Contrary to traditional news lab positions where journalists there are set editor positions, the interviewed advisers shared they establish their student leadership roles and expectations depending on their student strengths. The current study revealed an interesting finding that advisers discover their student strengths and then define the news lab's leadership positions. Furthermore, advisers establish leadership positions and provide the editors with specialized training and duties. Leadership is taught to the core student leaders and the soft skills are expected to trickle down. Advisers encourage their student leaders to be teachers and work side-by-side with their student staff, maximizing the news lab's full potential.

Advisers are responsible for creating an atmosphere committed to students knowing they must produce a high-quality product for audiences outside the news lab. Motivation is a key reason students show increased commitment to learning due to their news lab's high professional standards and rigorous work ethic expectations. This finding supports Journalism Educators Association's (2019) standard that high school journalism educators demonstrate the expertise to engage students with effective motivation. Overall, motivation is required for editors to lead their staff members through the completion of their rigorous deadline schedules. While advisers commented on their rigorous atmosphere, an overwhelming majority of advisers advocated connecting their students' work with set achievable goals and creating a supportive environment. Similarly, advisers search for opportunities by seizing the initiatives and looking for innovative ways to improve, experiment, and take risks. Advisers seek out challenging opportunities that test their news lab skills and constantly generate small wins and

learn from each experience.

A common vision is an essential feature for advisers to further motivate editors to be leaders. Advisers inspire a common vision throughout their news lab to produce their desired production results, encourage creativity, and foster group decision making. It is important for advisers and their editors to have shared practices and leadership behaviors. It is imperative for advisers to continually articulate production goals with their editors to then delegate to the student staff. Sharing common visions helps advisers create trust and consensus around their news lab's goals. These results build on Streisel's (2007) existing evidence that organizational workings of a scholastic journalism news lab have the potential to teach basic ways to plan content and build trust. Trust boosts a news lab's ability for students to effectively meet expectations on their own. Similarly, trust in the relationship between advisers and their student editors is critical. Relationships further build trust within news labs. Through relationships, advisers establish their most effective student leaders.

Implications: The role of leadership in scholastic journalism is important. Leaders used their strengths to build relationships, motivate fellow students, and develop healthy core values within high school journalism. These participants' perspectives should be considered throughout journalism education. Implementation of editorial leadership help develop students leadership skills to reach their full potential. Additionally, acknowledging the significant role of journalism education in academic growth, this study stresses the need for school districts and higher education to invest in scholastic journalism initiatives.

Conclusion

The current study's findings indicated leadership plays a leading role in scholastic journalism programs, known as editorial leadership. When an adviser establishes leadership as a foundation, news lab production increases, creativity is fostered, and decision making is delegated to the students. Thus, leadership skills are important in journalism education. Advisers said soft skills provided opportunities for students to grow into leaders. The student leaders then provided advisers opportunities to articulate their passion and genuine conviction. The advisers interviewed for this study were transformational leaders, creating trust and consensus around their news lab's common vision. Many transformational leadership theory components were

present within Missouri's scholastic journalism news labs. Kouzes and Posner's (1987) fundamental practice of inspiring a shared vision was the most utilized.

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